ISSN 0033-8672

THE RAGTIMER

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 1980

PUBLISHED BY
THE RAGTIME SOCIETY

DEDICATED TO THE PRESERVATION OF CLASSICAL RAGTIME

RECENT BOOKS OF INTEREST TO RAGTIMERS

Berlin, Edward A. Ragtime: A Musical and Cultural History. New York: World, 1980. 320p. $16.95.
Shows the evolution of ragtime within the musical and aesthetic context of the times, in an America still striving for its cultural identity.

UPCOMING FESTIVALS

May 23 - 26. Old Sacramento Dixieland Jubilee. For information write Sacramento Dixieland Jubilee, 1011 2nd St., Old Sacramento, California 95814; phone (816) 448-1251.

May 25, 1980. 6th Annual World Championship Old-Time Piano Playing Contest. Monticello, Illinois. (For more details, see the announcement in this issue of the Ragtimer.)

June 9 - 15. St. Louis Ragtime Festival. For information, write Goldenrod Showboat, 400 North Wharf St., St. Louis, Missouri 63102.

August 22 - 24. Central City Festival. For information, write Juanita Greenwood, 5920 W. Plymouth Drive, Littleton, Colo. 80123; phone (303) 979-4202 or (303) 777-4555.

RECENT RECORDINGS

"Great American Piano Bench: A Turn of the Century Keyboard Sampler." Max Morath. Vanguard VSD 79429.

Gives us an idea of the kinds of music being heard in American parlors at the same time as ragtime. Contents include: "Solace," by Scott Joplin; "Song without Words", "Castles' Half and Half", "The Perfect Melody", "Pelham Waltzes", "Marionette", "Minuet," by H. Ruifrok, "Wa-Wan Choral," by A. Farwell, "Ein Liedchen," by Ethelbert Nevin, "Bethena," by Joplin, "To a Wild Rose," by Edward MacDowell.

****

RAGTIME...
UNDER YOUR HAT

FOUNDED 1962
INCORPORATED 1970

THE RAGTIME SOCIETY
INCORPORATED

is a non - profit corporation having the following objects:

To preserve classical ragtime music and to pursue such other activities as shall serve to maintain and develop interest in classical ragtime music and music related thereto.

ARE YOU PLANNING
TO COME?

16th Annual "Bash"
THE RAGTIME SOCIETY

Cara Inn, Toronto
October 18, 1980

Details will appear in a later issue of THE RAGTIMER

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

As the warm spring weather reaches even as far north as Toronto, new life begins rising from the once-frozen ground. As you can see, the spring rains have even nurtured the January/February issue of The Ragtimer. As you'll remember from our recent letter, there have been problems in producing this particular issue; but we seem to have ourselves reorganized at last.

We want to express our thanks for all the articles and bits of news that you members submit to us. Without them, there would be no Ragtimer at all, for if we had to locate all this information on our own, we'd never get an issue put together.

We hope that any time any of you find anything that might be of interest to Society members - even to a small segment of the membership - you will share it with us. Just slip a copy of the article or piece of news into an envelope and send it on to us.

The Ragtimer belongs to all of us!

THE RAGTIMER is the official publication of THE RAGTIME SOCIETY Inc., P.O. Box 520, Stn. A., Weston, Ontario, Canada M9N 3N3. All rights to THE RAGTIMER are reserved to the Corporation. Membership is $8.00 per year and includes all issues of THE RAGTIMER published during the current year.

RECORD REVIEW

by
TEX
WYNDHAM

Folkways FS 3164 'Days Beyond Recall', piano solos by Trebor Tichenor

Selections: Hickory-Smoked Rag, Cotton Bolls, Wine Room Rag, Dixie Queen, Cottonwood Rag, Swamptown Shuffle, Days Beyond Recall, Essay In Ragtime, Piney Woods Rag, Bantam Step, Missouri Rambler, Crab Apples, Pierce City Rag, French Pastry Rag, Mandy's Broadway Stroll, Market St. Rag.

Available, probably @ $7.98, from Folkways Records, 43 West 61st Street, New York City, New York 10023.

In this collection of nine vintage solos and seven Tichenor compositions, Trebor Tichenor proves again that he is a master of "country" or "folk" ragtime - the earliest rag style, developed before Scott Joplin brought longer melodic lines and overall cohesion to the idiom, often consisting of a few syncopated licks over a bouncing two-beat, loosely connected into several jingling, high-spirited themes. As might be expected from a recognized authority on the genre, Treb's program includes a number of superb choices making, to my knowledge, their Lp debut, such as Thomas E. Broady's strutting 1898 masterpiece 'Mandy's'; Les Copeland's carefully constructed 1914 'French', with its tinkling first strain, funky second, and stirring trio that Tichenor fleshes out on the repeat for a flashy finish; Charles Hunter's raggedy 1901 'Cotton', bright and percussive; and Robert Hoffman's 1906 'Dixie', a relatively thin score which Treb decorates, as in several others here, via some broken octaves in the bass and a few treble fills, plus a touch of streamlining to keep the pulse jumping ahead. His own works are in a compatible vein, stomping along with clipped phrases and a slight echo - courtesy of the sustaining pedal - that combines with his sudden chord changes to evoke a wistful nostalgic mood befitting the album's title. A long string of unpretentious down-home rags, unrelieved by, say, the majesty of a Scott or the complexity of a Confrey, can place a monochromatic aspect upon the overall picture, but it must be said that Tichenor performs the material marvelously and that virtually no one else is recording it.

* * *

Polydor PD 6033 2391 144 'Fiedler In Rags', by The Boston Pops Orchestra conducted by Arthur Fiedler

Selections: The Entertainer, Sugar Cane Rag, The Easy Winners, Maple Leaf Rag, Charleston Rag, Alexander's Ragtime Band, 12th Street Rag, Darktown Strutters' Ball/Jelly Roll Blues, Tiger Rag, Variations On Varsity Drag.

Produced by Polydor Incorporated, 810 Seventh Avenue, New York, New York 10019.

Its 1974 copyright suggesting that the session dates from the ragtime boom of the early 70s, this Lp gives us a brief look (total running time - 33:57) at the resources a large professional orchestra can bring to bear on classic ragtime. Side One treats five classic rags with skill and respect, building the performances effectively via a change of tonal color at every opportunity: the A strain of 'Entertainer', for example, appears four times - clarinet call/woodwind response, woodwind call/brass response, string lead, trumpet call/band response; 'Sugar' moves from gliding orchestral 1st strain reprise into singing small-ensemble strings for trio, riding into a foot-stomping finish; 'Maple' comes on at a slightly more deliberate pace and darker flavor from low brass, gathering power for a driving rideout; and 'Easy' and 'Charleston' are just as glorious, containing delights too varied to list. On the flip side, '12th' takes a lighthearted view of the tune's elementary structure, which works well enough, but 'Alexander's' and 'Tiger' lack depth while the openly campy approach to 'Darktown' and 'Varsity', replete with tinny pianos, gun shots, oo-gahs, over-frantic jazz parodies and other grotesqueries, makes me wonder why anyone thought we would tolerate such trivia in our living rooms for more than one listen. Since you're only getting about half a record, I'd wait 'till you can catch it at a 50%-off sale.

* * *

Upstairs Upst-1 'Turnips', solos composed and played by Donald Ashwander on electric harpsichord, chordiana and rhythm box (plus piano on portions of 'Cascade Plunge')

Selections: State Line, Turnips, Reason's Fee, Bay Breeze, Little Saints Hopping, Morning Song, Causeway Blues, Laurel, Mulberry, Waterloo Rag, Threnody, Cascade Plunge, Alabama Backroads, First Avenue.

Upstairs Upst-2 'Sunshine And Shadow', piano solos composed and played by Donald Ashwander

Selections: Request; Saratoga Rag; Saturday Night, Manhattan; October; Old Streets; Summer Garden; The Garden At Night; Traditional Patterns (Dove In The Window, Crow Tracks, Road To California, Drunkard's Path, Sunshine And Shadow, Pine Tree, Goose In The Pond, The Moonflower Vine); Nocturne In E.

Available separately @ $7.98 postpaid from Upstairs Records, 221 1st. Avenue, New York City, New York 10003.

Donald Ashwander is a contemporary composer and performer with an impressive body of rags in his portfolio as well as other works which are importantly influenced by his knowledge of and sensitivity for ragtime. Thus, coverage of these two Lps in this column seems warranted even though only about half of Upst-1 is comprised of tunes mounting a reasonably syncopated line over a steady boom-chick rhythm, and much less on Upst-2, which includes a lengthy suite made up of eight brief impressions (the intrincate-but-very-short 'Drunkard's Path', however, will bring a grin to the face of any fan of novelty rag). Both are well recorded and cleanly played.

The use of electric harpsichord on Upst-1 gives the rags thereon a novel and inviting music-boxy aura, and when the rhythm box joins in, as on 'Bay Breeze'

a foot-tapping, jazzy feeling takes over. Electrification allows for further variety via changes in sound texture, sometimes organish, sometimes electric guitarish, sometimes medieval as in the medium-tempo waltz 'Reason's Fee'.

Ashwander's material has a flowing, soothing quality, with relatively little use of jarring dissonance or dramatic climaxes, plus a romantic atmosphere often evoking bygone days, adding up to inoffensive listening for someone like me, whose exposure to anything beyond the ragtime-traditional jazz-and-related music horizon is so limited that I can't really offer informed appraisal of the bulk of what's here. 'Saratoga' (punchy), 'October' (graceful), 'Causeway' (funky), and their ilk speak more in my language, and with much in them to like. Obviously, though, these discs are for ragophile completists or ragtimers with eclectic tastes.

****

DICK HYMAN IN CONCERT

On April 12, Dick Hyman appeared at Emery Auditorium in Cincinnati, Ohio, performing on the Auditorium's Albee theater organ. The theme of the concert was Fats Waller's pipe organ material.

****

LOUISIANA EXHIBIT NOW ON THE ROAD

Reprinted from the "Washington Life" section of the Washington (D. C.) Star, January 12, 1980.

"What you have to remember about Louisiana, Diana Rose was saying just before sitting down at the piano to play the ever-popular "Whoa, You Heifer Rag," is that nobody in the state takes anything too seriously.

The thing is, she's right; it helps to remember this when you are walking around an exhibit that opened yesterday at the Kennedy Center and you run across a piece of sheet music for a song called "Mary, the Pride of the Dairy, is My Sweetheart."

And it doesn't hurt to remember it when you see a copy of the famous "Storyville Blue Book," a consumer's guide to the legal bordellos of New Orleans in the red light district that flourished during World War I after an alderman named Story complained that vice was rampant in the city and ought to be confined to a limited area. (The denizens of the district, with a fine New Orleans sense of humor, promptly named it "Storyville.")

All of this comes up because of the exhibit which has the mellifluous and lengthy name of - take a deep breath - "Played With Immense Success: Louisiana Music, 1840-1940, a Singing Century." The exhibit was originally organized by, and was a smashing success at, the Louisiana State Museum and now is ensconced, through Feb. 24, in the Kennedy Center's North Gallery, located on the Roof Terrace level just outside the Performing Arts Library.

The Kennedy Center is the first stop on a two-year tour for the exhibit under the auspices of the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service (SITES), and is the first SITES exhibit ever to be seen in Washington, if such things matter to you. They shouldn't; the exhibit is too much fun on its own terms.

The exhibit consists of about 100 objects and about 350 pieces of sheet music, many of them from the private collection of Al Rose, who happens to be Diana Rose's husband. He also happens to be New Orleans born and bred, the grandson of a man who ran the major vaudeville theater in the Crescent City and an old friend of most of the major New Orleans musicians and composers.

"I saw early on that there was something unique about Louisiana published music, in that it was the only sheet music in this country published for the place where it was published," Rose was saying yesterday. "Music published in New York was being published for the whole country; music published in New Orleans was published for New Orleans."

Rose began collecting the sheet music and other musical memorabilia at the age of 6. He now is 64, a hearty man with a gray beard and an author whose most recent book, a biography of the nearly-97-year-old pianist-composer Eubie Blake, is doing very well, thank you. He has donated most of his collection to the Tulane University library, but the Louisiana State Museum borrowed many of the items for this exhibit.

Along with the sheet music are a number of other historical items. Most notable, perhaps, is the first trumpet played by Louis Armstrong when he was a temporary resident of the New Orleans Colored Waif's Home, where he was sent for firing a pistol into the air as a young boy in the midst of celebrating both his birthday and the Fourth of July.

But there are many others, all illustrating the all-pervasive role of music in the state's life. There is a banjo-ukelele played by Johnny St. Cyr, a colleague of Armstrong's in the King Oliver Creole Jazz Band; a clarinet played by Larry Shields, a member of the Original Dixieland Jass Band, which made the very first recording of jazz music; a scepter used by the Queen of Rex in the Mardi Gras carnival of 1887; and a laurel wreath awarded to the composer Louis Gottschalk in the late 19th century.

Even the Storyville Blue Book has its musical connection. One of the ways the bordellos competed with each other was in the quality of their piano players, and thus the existence of the legalized red light district contributed to the development of early jazz solo piano-playing.

But the most striking thing about the show, and especially its sheet music, is the demonstration of the Louisiana tradition of writing and publishing songs about just about everything that has any sort of local, national or international interest. As Rose put it, "if you had an ax to grind, you wrote a song and got it published."

So, if you were for maintaining the gold standard, you wrote a song saying so; if you were for free silver, you wrote a song saying that. If you loved Theodore

Roosevelt, you wrote a song called "Just Teddy." If you supported the Confederacy, you wrote a song called "Bonnie Blue Flag," which became the Confederate National Anthem. If you liked Huey Long, you wrote a song called "Every Man a King." If a favorite actor died, you wrote a song called "Rudolph Valentino, How We Miss You," and if someone you disliked refused to pass on to his reward, you wrote a song called "I'll Be Glad When You're Dead, You Rascal, You."

But not all of it is related to causes. Whatever seized someone's attention was worthy of a song: a local resort ("Milneburg Joys", in which the resort of Milenburg was misspelled), a local newspaper ("The Picayune Frog Polka"), a favorite beverage ("Southern Perfection Beer Polka"), an occupation ("The Creole Pieman Song"), even a music publisher himself ("135 Canal Street Waltz", celebrating the address of one of the leading New Orleans publishers).

All of the sheet music for these songs is on display in the exhibit. Vaughn Glasgow, chief curator for the Louisiana State Museum, says that 1840, the starting date for the objects in the show, was chosen because it was the nearest round number to 1838, the date when musical engraving began. (The closing date, 1940, was picked because it coincided roughly with the start of World War II, and the end of the regional tradition in American music publishing.)

Some of the artwork on the sheet music is striking. One incredible example is on the sheet music for a song published in 1865 called "Reconstruction". The top engraving, depicting a heavenly choir making music, is captioned "as it should be". The bottom engraving, showing a scene of the bottommost layer of hell, is captioned "as it is".

Oh, about the title of the show . . . "Played With Immense Success" was an advertising legend used by one of the New Orleans music publishers in that bygone era when a million seller referred to a piece of sheet music rather than to the then-uninvented phonograph record. If you care to see it, it's on several of the sheet music covers in the exhibit, as is the very first million-seller piece of sheet music, "In the Gloaming", published in 1878."

****

JAMES SCOTT HEADSTONE

We have received word from Helen and Smiley Wallace that plans are underway to buy a headstone for the presently unmarked grave of James Scott, in Kansas City, Kansas. The cut-off date for contributions was March 15. Although the Ragtime Society contributed to the headstone fund, this delayed January/February Ragtimer is appearing too late for Society members to contribute individually. On the chance that the deadline might have been extended, anyone interested in contributing can write to:

David Wallace, Jr., 8623 Robinson St., Overland Park, Kansas 66212

or to: James Scott Memorial, c/o Tower State Bank, 1314 North 38th St., Kansas City, Kansas 66102.

****

JOE "FINGERS" CARR KILLED IN AUTO ACCIDENT

Louis Ferdinand Busch, who was the ragtime artist known as Joe "Fingers" Carr, was killed on Sept. 18, 1979, in California. Instrumental in keeping ragtime in the public eye during the years before the revival, Lou Busch also played a large part in expanding ragtime's audience - as well as the number of performers of ragtime - in the post-Sting years. Along with Johnny Maddox (Crazy Otto) and Dick Hyman (Knuckles O'Toole), he played a strong honky-tonk style ragtime. Joe "Fingers" Carr's contribution to the ragtime world cannot be overestimated.

****

BOB MILNE RECORD OUT

We've heard from Ragtimer W. J. West that Bob Milne has a new record out. We'll all look forward to seeing a review by Tex Wyndham in a future issue of The Ragtimer.

****

"CRAZY OTTO" AT THE KEYBOARD

By Joseph McLellan. Reprinted from the Washington (D. C.) Post, Nov. 26, 1979.

"Let's have a little piano ragtime in the background, and while the left hand marches and the right hand dances, let us think about glory and tension and fatigue, let us praise men who have tasted success and looked for another taste, let us feel the charm of old music and the even greater charm of a quiet life right here in Old Town Alexandria, won painfully after a life of frenzy. Let us talk about pianist Johnny Maddox.

Pianist Johnny Maddox is not one of ragtime's grand old men; at 51, he can't match numbers with such veterans as Eubie Blake. But he is one of the art's grand middle-aged men, and he won a secure place in its history almost half a lifetime ago.

Today, after selling more than 11 million records, giving a pop record company its start, barnstorming for years as a ragtime pianist and undergoing a traumatic divorce and a fitful retirement, Maddox is back at the keyboard, deliberately keeping a low profile as the resident pianist at a restaurant in Alexandria. He is still making records (his total to date is 87 singles and 43 albums, nine of which went gold), but now, he says, "When I do a record, we only press 1, 000 copies and that's it - they're for specialists, not for the general public."

Maddox grabbed his chunk of ragtime history in 1955, when he was a seasoned professional musician, working days in a record store in his home town, Gallatin, Tenn., and playing nights (as he had since he was 12) in a dance band. Ragtime music was a hobby - he had learned it from black people with whom he grew up, from his great-aunt, who played ragtime at the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904, and from old-timers whom he began interviewing while they were still around to talk to.

The record store where Maddox worked was owned by one Randy Wood, who did a large mail-order business and had founded a small label of his own, Dot Records. Maddox had made the company's first record - "a couple of ragtime tunes," he recalls. "I was amazed, five weeks later, when Randy told me, 'We have already sold 22, 000 copies.'"

That was only a prelude. Along came a soldier returning from Germany with a record he had bought there, a disc jockey began playing it on local radio, and when people began coming into the record shop for copies, there were none. Dot Records and Johnny Maddox were on the spot, ready to supply the demand - with a piano deliberately untuned to get the right jangly sound. "Dot made a lot of money doing cover records (records that 'cover' the same material already recorded by other artists), Maddox recalls now. "From his experience in the record shop, Randy remembered what sold well by mail."

What happened next is recorded by Rudi Blesh and Harriet Janis in "They All Played Ragtime," the basic history of the art: "Ragtime had not sold a million of anything since Scott Joplin's 'Maple Leaf Rag' of 1899 passed that mark in sheet music sales. Then in 1955 along came pianist Johnny Maddox with his 'Crazy Otto' rag medley record. It is a true parallel a half-century apart: 'Maple Leaf' established a music publishing house; 'Crazy Otto' established a prosperous recording company."

When the dust had settled, the record had sold more than 2 million copies and Maddox had enriched not only Dot Records and himself, but the first Ragtime Revival, which had begun in the 1940s and was until then moving along modestly (the second Ragtime Revival began with the release of "The Sting" five years ago, a sound-track of music by Scott Joplin, and we are still in the middle of it). Until then, Maddox had been known only as a juke-box artist, but after the "Crazy Otto" record he took to the road and, like such performers as Max Morath and Joe "Fingers" Carr, began to make a good living playing ragtime piano.

"God, how I fought it," Maddox recalls. "I get homesick the minute I leave the city limits of my home town. All of a sudden I was taking my hobby out to the world, and I felt like a missionary in a lot of places. Even today, in a place like North Dakota, you still have to get up and talk a lot - let them know what you're doing. There are a lot of people out there who haven't heard anything but rock and top-40."

At Il Porto Ristorante in Alexandria, where he is the pianist in residence except for three months of vacation each year, Maddox still likes to talk about the music. He is an expert on American popular music of all kinds from the late 1800s to the early 1930s, and if the audience gives him any encouragement he can talk at length on the various composers, their lives, work and styles. Besides being a performer, he is a scholar in the field, with a collection of more than 100, 000 pieces of original sheet music ("You used to get it for a dime or a quarter, but you can't anymore"), more than 2, 000 old Edison cylinder records, piano rolls and a houseful of books and old magazines.

"I have spent 40 years doing research on this music," he says, "and my main source has been the people who played the music when it was new. There were still a lot of them around when I began about 1950."

He recalls meeting W. C. Handy in 1950 in New York, learning from him the correct style for playing "St. Louis Blues" on the piano and being introduced to friends by Handy as "a white boy with colored fingers." He was born much too late to know Scott Joplin (who died, much too young, in 1917) but he knew several of Joplin's friends and colleagues, and from conversations with them he has worked out his own theory of the very slow tempo markings found on almost all of Joplin's sheet music.

"Joplin was a great composer," says Maddox, "but his friends told me that he was not a very good pianist. The only music he ever played was his own, and he never played it the same way twice. I think those tempo markings indicate the speed that he found comfortable." Maddox takes Joplin's music much faster than a pianist like Joshua Rifkin, who follows the score as though he were playing a European classic. "He takes saloon music and makes salon music out of it," says Maddox, "but Gunther Schuller does it right - those are authentic arrangements he uses, and his own arrangements are in the right style."

Although his own collection of sheet music dates back as far as the Revolutionary period, Maddox believes ragtime sheet music should be approached with a certain freedom and skepticism: "A lot of the people who played and composed it didn't read music, and a lot of the publishers would change it - simplify it so that the dime-store customers could play it. You can't always trust piano rolls, either - sometimes they were 'improved.' There are at least a couple of piano rolls in circulation with my name on them, and I had nothing to do with them."

In a sense, there are two people coexisting in Johnny Maddox. One is Crazy Otto, ragtime pianist who made it big a quarter-century ago, and who now plays honky-tonk piano in a striped shirt and bow tie on an old upright with its front panel removed ("people like to see the hammers moving") and lacquer carefully applied to the felt on the hammers for a tinny, old-time sound. The other is Johnny Maddox, scholarly pianist who makes his recordings on a concert grand for a deliberately limited audience, suggests that a lot of ragtime was originally composed on concert grands rather than uprights and collects documentation on popular music.

They seem to get on well enough together, but sometimes they get in one another's way. Maddox has been asked to lecture at various universities, including the University of Maryland, for example, but he says, "I don't think I'm ready - I've been playing in saloons so long."

On the other hand, after being Crazy Otto from 1955 to 1969, Maddox found that "I was going a little crazy" and retired. He moved out of the country (to Salzburg, Mozart's home town, of all places in the world) and deliberately cut off all contacts with booking agents and record companies. "I didn't want any more," he says. "I was mad at the world and had gone through a terrible divorce. I didn't like the tax bracket I was in, or the pressure of performing every night and not taking any breaks."

In Salzburg, he bought his own home, didn't do any work for two years, and hardly had any contact with his neighbours, whose language he didn't speak.

One of his neighbours had lived in England and spoke English, and he recalls, "She would go shopping with me. 'We don't pay full price,' she would say. 'That's for Americans.'"

After a couple of years, Crazy Otto began to assert himself again; Maddox found that he missed the people he used to play for "and my conscience was bothering me because I thought I had something to offer." He began traveling again and hated it ("not the playing - that was fine - but the traveling,") and decided that he would "try to space it better."

Maddox's arrangement with Il Porto represents his solution to the tension between Crazy Otto and Johnny Maddox - indicating that perhaps Otto isn't so crazy, after all. Out in Hollywood, he recalls, he has his name set in the concrete of the sidewalk of Hollywood Boulevard, right next to that of Will Rogers. "When I first saw it," he says, "I thought this is one time my name won't be mistaken for Johnny Mathis - otherwise, I don't think it means much."

What does mean much, he says cryptically, is music. "Music is one thing you don't have to lie about."

****

PIANO PLAYING CONTEST

The 6th Annual World Championship Old-Time Piano Playing Contest will be held Sunday, May 25, at the Monticello & Sangamon Valley Railway Museum, Monticello, Illinois. The admission charge is $1.50. Railroad train rides are available between 1:00 p. m. and 4:00 p. m. (the piano contest admission is free with train tickets), and the piano contest starts at 1:30 p. m. Food can be bought on the premises, and there is a museum gift shop. Take Interstate 72 to Exit No. 63, just north of Monticello, Illinois; use the Frontage Road. After the contest, there is an "Afterglow/Sing-a-long Session" at Foster's Bowl in Monticello.

****

EUBIE BLAKE AT 97

As most Society members know, Eubie Blake celebrated his 97th birthday on February 7, 1980, with a ceremony at the Songwriters' Hall of Fame.

As usual, Eubie has not rested on his laurels at all. Since the beginning of the year, he has appeared on the Tonight Show, with Johnny Carson, on the Mike Douglas Show, on the Today Show with Gene Shallit. He also gave a concert in Baltimore, Maryland, and a few days later was a guest at a sit-down dinner at the White House. (Eubie reports that President Carter himself came over to him and said, "I hope you'll play us a tune." Needless to say, Eubie did play.)

On Sunday, April 20, Eubie was the guest of honor at a testimonial dinner at Quinnipiac College, in a suburb of New Haven, Connecticut. During this tenth year of the Quinnipiac Jazz Festival, banners waved in the streets to proclaim Eubie Blake Day!

In honor of Eubie's birthday, we'd like to pass along to Ragtimers an article sent to us by Richard Ruppert, of La Jolla, California. The article originally

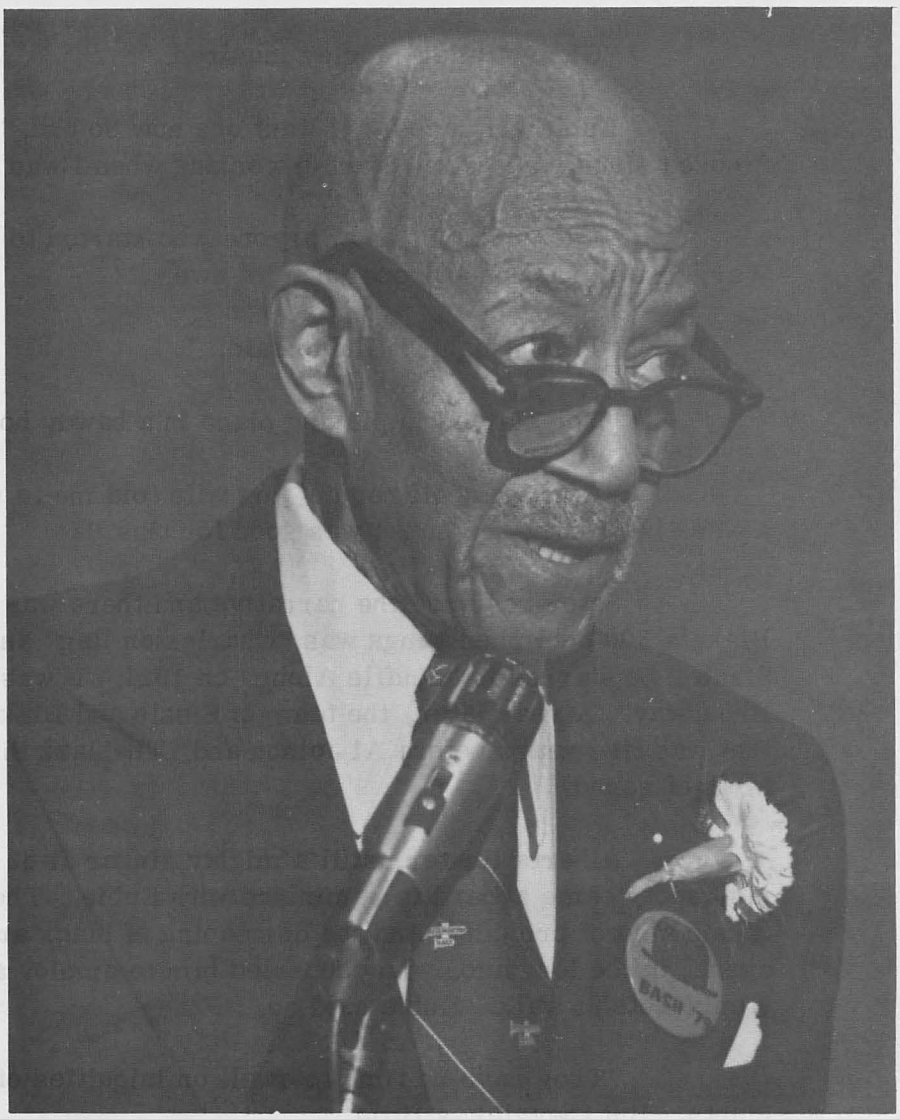
appeared in The San Diego Union of July 3, 1979, under the by-line of Don Freeman.

"He is 96 now, spry and agile and full of ginger. His name is James Hubert Blake - they call him Eubie - and he sat himself at the piano and his lithe fingers, like a newborn colt on a meadow, frolicked merrily across the keyboard. He had the look of a man who could play forever and I fervently hope he does.

Arthritis and the miseries of age have been nipping at those long, sinewy, graceful and commanding fingers. But they still race over the keys, the striding arpeggios as clear as bird-song, the mischievous bass notes as sturdy as a corner-stone.

So there was Eubie Blake on "60 Minutes," and the sight of him, playing and reminiscing in tempo, was a moment of television to cherish.

One thinks of Picasso, still painting with great skill and power to the end in his 90s. Frank Lloyd Wright in his late 80s was still bringing the fruits of his genius to architectural design. On his 88th birthday, George Bernard Shaw was still writing his peppery dramas and complaining as well that he was compelled to pay a scandalous $96,000 in income taxes.



Anthropologists tell us that longevity well beyond 100 years is a commonplace of life in three areas on the globe - the Soviet Republic of Georgia, Ecuador and Kashmir. Is there a secret these people have in their defiance of the calendar? Aside from a diet low in saturated fats, the people in these areas do share one other singular attribute - in their respective cultures there is no such word in the language as "retirement."

Furthermore, the elderly, who continue to perform useful work, are held in conspicuously high esteem. It would seem, on the evidence, to be a good thing. A very good thing.

On "60 Minutes," Dan Rather noted that the segment on Eubie Blake had come along originally about a

year ago. "A working pro," Rather said by way of description as a shot of Eubie flashed on the screen. He was then, Rather added, a young fellow of only 95. And a Broadway musical entitled "Eubie," consisting mainly of his tunes, had since become a hit.

It was, altogether, a nice way to bring on a repeat, with Morley Safer conducting the interview, which opened on a note suggestive of the old joke about the octogenarian who, on his birthday, exclaimed: "If I'd have known I was going to live this long I'd have taken better care of myself."

Eubie Blake harbors no such reservations. "Experts," Morley began, "tell us that the secret to a long life is plenty of exercise, eat right and don't smoke, and you violate those rules."

"Every last one," Eubie said.

"Exercise?" Morley said.

Eubie shook his head vigorously. "Not the first," he scoffed. "I eat a pound and a half of candy every day."

"Cigarettes?" Morley inquired.

Eubie grimaced. "I want one now so bad," he said. "I smoke all the time. Smoked since I was six. Started working when I was 15."

"I don't think I know anyone who started to work during the Spanish-American War," Safer said on a proper note of awe.

"That's right," Eubie said.

"You started in playing piano in a bawdy house," Morley prompted.

"A house of ill repute, my wife told me to say," Eubie said. "Got paid $3 a week but I knew the house was good for tips."

Safer resumed the narrative and there was much to tell. The first of Eubie Blake's 300 published songs was "Charleston Rag" and he wrote it in 1899. With Noble Sissle, he starred in "Shuffle Along" on 1921. It was the first major all-black show on Broadway. A year later, the team of Sissle and Blake appeared in a talking picture - that was five years before Al Jolson and "The Jazz Singer," generally considered the birth of sound.

Alberta Hunter, still a mighty singer at 83 and working now in a New York nightspot, came aboard to reminisce with Eubie. They talked of good times and they talked also of prejudice and the demeaning of black artists and Eubie remembered an agent, in the long ago, who counseled him to employ a minstrel-show dialect and a Stepin Fetchit walk. Eubie said no.

"They have no time to dwell on iniquities of the past," Safer said of these two giants. But they did, a little.

He's wondrously ageless, Eubie Blake - the Satchel Paige of the piano, the Archie Moore of music, and I remember, just a couple of years ago, seeing Eubie on a morning children's show and he was playing for a studio audience of little kids, playing the enduring songs from his facile pen - "I'm Just Wild About Harry" and "You Were Meant for Me" and "Memories of You." The kids adored him.

I'm doing push-ups in front of the set and Eubie is touching the final notes of "Memories of You" and one of the kids shouts: "Mr. Blake, will you come see us next year?"

He was then already into his 90s, you must remember, and these are children with no intimations of fragile mortality. They cannot be expected to know the meaning of one year to a man who has survived more than 90 of them.

"I'll be back in a year," Eubie pledges, "but only under one condition."

"What's that?" the kids pipe.

Eubie pauses. "Only," said Eubie Blake with a smile, "if you invite me." And then, as I recall, there must have been something in my eye because the television set turned misty, and I did more push-ups and I hoped that Eubie Blake could keep that promise, which he did."

****

OLD PIANO ROLL BLUES

by Irvin Lutsky
Reprinted from the Toronto Star,
April 2, 1980.

"Lawyer Ramsi P. Tick leaves his home in Fort Erie every morning and takes a quick drive across the Peace Bridge to his office in Buffalo, N. Y.

But unlike most lawyers, Tick will see no clients, make no court appearances and is not involved in law suits or damage claims.

Instead, Tick runs the world's largest and oldest producer of player piano rolls - QRS Music Rolls Inc, which is about to expand into Canada.

QRS knocks out some 600, 000 piano rolls a year and Canada accounts for about 10 per cent of the market.

The company once operated a branch factory in Toronto, but declining sales forced QRS to close it.

"The re-establishment of our Canadian plant is particularly desirable," says Tick. "This will affect many economies in that portion of our business having to do with Canada, where there will be substantial savings of 7. 3 per cent in import duties and 9 per cent in sales tax."

Original rags

The magic of the piano roll makes it possible for those with player pianos to hear Fats Waller play Ain't Misbehavin' today in their living rooms using their piano. The QRS catalogue still contains original rags played by Scott Joplin, whose music was the background for the movie The Sting.

Toronto's John Arpin recorded four titles for QRS including Chitty Chitty Bang Bang. QRS is trying to get Oscar Peterson to do some rolls.

A piano roll is just what its name implies. A loosely wound roll of perforated paper that fits into a piano with a mechanism that causes the keys to move and produce music. Nobody knows how many player pianos are still in existence but QRS estimates that in 1916, the player piano accounted for 60 per cent of all U. S. piano production. There are now four U. S. companies producing player pianos that play QRS rolls. Prices range from $2,000 and up for new models. Older player pianos range in price from about $200 for a used upright in need of rebuilding to $20,000 or more for instruments like a Duo-Art grand produced by the Steinway Company.

Award winners

QRS rolls are not all nostalgia. The company's catalogue is heavy on the past but an increasing proportion of the material it offers is Grammy award songs, Broadway medleys, Academy Award winners and country and western hits.

The company has been in operation for 80 years. Its founder, Melville Clark, is credited with developing the player piano as it is known today. By 1916, the QRS catalogue listed 10,000 piano rolls. The rolls were punched on graph paper directly from sheet music.

But in 1917, Clark revolutionized the industry by inventing the "marker piano" - a piano with an attachment that automatically punched the perforations in a paper roll as the piano keys were depressed.

The original Clark marker piano is still in use at the QRS plant in Buffalo. The first "hand-played roll" was Pretty Baby, recorded in 1917 by ragtime pianist Charlie Straight. It is still available.

Fats Waller was another QRS performer of that era. By 1926 roll sales exceeded 10 million. QRS diversified, adding phonographs, cameras and radio tubes to a broadening line of home entertainment products.

The 1929 stock market crash ended the growth of the piano roll business along with growth in its other lines. Cheap competition from records and radio, a general lack of cash everywhere and the old fashioned image of the player piano created hard times for QRS.

Piano roll sales slumped to a low of about 200,000 a year in the early 1950s. Do-it-yourself hobbyists began restoring old player instruments and some U. S. piano producers introduced the small spinet player piano. The new units included electric powered models that do not require the operator to pump the pedals in order to create the air pressure needed to work the piano.

QRS is still a diversified entertainment product company. Tick offers a piano roll course to teach people how to play the instrument by following the keys as they are depressed by the player mechanism, among others.

If you want to see how the rolls are made, QRS will be glad to show you around. You can call the company at 716-885-4600 if you want any additional information.

****

EUBIE

Toronto Ragtimers are eagerly looking forward to the arrival of Eubie, the Broadway musical. The show will be at the Royal Alexandra Theatre from June 3 to July 19, with over half the original cast.

****

"CANADIAN CAPERS" NEEDED

Society member Jack Hutton is looking for a copy of the two-piano version of "Canadian Capers." The music is out of print, and he hasn't been able to locate it in second-hand stores in either New York or Toronto.

If you can help Jack, write to him at:

55 Walmsley Blvd.,
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
M4V 1X7

****

SOMETHING DOING...

JOHN ARPIN

Chelsea Inn, 33 Gerrard St. W., Toronto. In "The Piano Bar" M-F 5-8 p. m., and with his trio in "The Chelsea Bun" lounge M-S 9 p. m. to 1 a. m.

BRIAN AND KATHY BAUER

Rodeway Inn, 7001 Buffalo Ave., Niagara Falls, N. Y. Appearing with Lou "Al Jolson" Lasota and Fritz Raiser, every Friday from 9 p. m. to 1 a. m.

STEEN CHRISTENSEN

Mechanical Music Museum (MMM), Vesterbrodage 150, Copenhagen, Denmark. Performs the 2nd and 4th Wednesday of each month.

CHRYSANTHEMUM RAGTIME BAND

Hotel Utah, 4th and Bryant Streets, San Francisco, California. Performing Jan. 12, 1980 at 9. 30 and 11. 00 p. m. Will also appear on Thurs., Jan. 31, as part of the Plowshares concert series (in conjunction with San Francisco's Mardi Gras festivities).

DON EWELL

Esplanade Lounge, Royal Orleans Hotel, New Orleans, La. A piano player par excellence - ragtime, Morton style, and Waller style.

DAVE FLOWITT

Brunswick Hotel, Brunswick St., Toronto. With Dr. McJazz Band, Thursday through Sat., 9 p. m. to 1 a. m.

Chelsea Inn, 33 Gerrard St. W., Toronto. With the Chelsea Chasers Trio and Dr. McJazz Band (alternating weeks), on Saturdays, 2-5 p. m.

GALE FOEHNER

Stillson Street Garage and Restaurant, 23 Stillson St., Rochester, New York. Plays ragtime, jazz, and blues on Wednesdays, from 8:00 p. m. to midnight.

GEORGE FOLEY

Barnhill's Restaurant, 6339 Olde York Road, Parma Heights, Ohio. Plays Thursday through Sunday, 7 p. m. to midnight, on the 7-foot Orchestra Piano.

ROBIN FROST

Olive Mill Bistro, 1295 Coast Village Road, Montecito (Santa Barbara), Calif. Frost plays with The Bistro All Stars, every Sunday 9:30 p. m. to 12:30 a. m.

ROBERT GOODNOW

Broadmoor Hotel, Colorado Springs, Colorado.

EDDIE GREEN

Proctor House Restaurant, Lowell St., Peabody, Mass. Green (known to Society members as Ed Greenberg) plays Wed., Thurs., Fri., and some Saturdays. He doesn't play rags, but he enjoys ragtime and would like to meet any Ragtime Society members in the area.

RALPH GRUEGEL

Peabody's, Cedar and Taylor Road, Cleveland Heights, Ohio. With The Eagle Jazz Band, Friday, 8-12 p. m.

The Roadhouse, 8425 Old Route "8", Northfield Center, Ohio. Appearing on Saturdays.

TERRY HARTZEL

Il Porto Ristorante, 121 King St., Alexandria, Virginia. Mondays only. Ragtime piano.

JOHN HASSE

The Ordinary, Nashville, Indiana. Appearing Friday and Saturday nights.

TOM "JAZZOO" JONES

The Paddlewheel Bar, "Mississippi Queen," New Orleans to Vicksburg.

JIM KAPLAN

Pizza-Stein, 1428 W. Galena Ave., Freeport, Illinois. Appearing on Tuesday, Friday, and Sunday.

TOM LOUGH

Loose Caboose, KSU Eastway Center, Kent, Ohio. Jazz piano. Friday, 4-8 p. m.

JOHNNY MADDOX

Il Porto Ristorante, 121 King St., Alexandria, Virginia. Appearing Tuesday through Sunday.

BOB MILNE

Charley's Crab Restaurant, Troy, Mich. (I-75 at Crook's Road Exit). Appears 4 p. m. to 12:30 a. m. daily, including Sunday (alternating with Bob Seeley).

MIKE MONTGOMERY

Rathskeller, The Dakota Inn, John R. Road (north of McNichols), Detroit, Michigan. Appearing Friday nights.

NEW SUNSHINE JAZZ BAND

Biltmore Ballroom (upstairs), 1811 Columbia Rd., N.W., Washington, D.C. Appearing the 3rd Sunday and 1st Wednesday of every month, 9 p.m. - midnight.

DR. ELI NEWBERGER

Sticky Wicket Pub, West Main St., Hopkinton, Massachusetts. Appearing with the New Black Eagle Jazz Band (pianist, Bob Pilsbury), Thursdays, 8-12 p.m.

DARYL OTT

The Fishmarket Back Room, 106 King St., Alexandria, Virginia. Solo ragtime piano nightly.

QUEEN CITY RAGTIME ENSEMBLE

Zeno's 1421 Larimer, Denver, Colorado. Performs with the Queen City Jazz Band every Friday and Saturday, approx. 10 p.m.

RAGTIME REVIVAL

Joe's Bar, Terrace Hilton Hotel, W. 6th off Vine, Cincinnati, Ohio. Features Robin Hopkins on banjo and Marty Hodap on tuba, along with a drummer, playing ragtime, vintage jazz, and old-time songs.

BOB SEELEY

Charley's Crab Restaurant, Troy, Mich. (I-75 at Crook's Rd. Exit) Appears 4 p.m. to 12:30 a.m. daily, including Sunday (alternating with Bob Milne).

RICHARD SKRIKA

Lee's Imperial Tavern, Riverside Drive, Windsor, Ontario. Pianist with the Eric Mannering New Imperial Jazz Band. Every Saturday, 4-7 p.m.

STEVE SPRACKLEN

Paddlewheel Lounge, Mississippi Queen (between New Orleans and St. Paul).

TREBOR TICHENOR

Goldenrod Showboat, St. Louis, Missouri. Appears every Saturday night. Trebor also has a weekly radio show on KWMU-FM (90.7), "Ragophile with Trebor Tichenor," Fridays, 7-8 p.m.

TARHEEL TICKLER

Sportsmen's Lounge, Onslow Drive (off Highway 17), Jacksonville, North Carolina, Monday - Saturday.

JERRY TRAUNIG

Brownstone Restaurant, Hartford, Connecticut.

TERRY WALDO

Crazy Horse Saloon, Bush Blvd., at Route 161 (near I-71), Columbus, Ohio. Appears with singer Susan Lamarche, Sundays, 8 p. m. to 1 a. m.

TEX WYNDHAM

The Green Room, Hotel DuPont, 11th & Market Sts., Wilmington, Dela. Appears with The Red Lion Jazz Band, 1st Friday every month, 8:30 p. m. to 12:30 a. m. Phone (302) 656-8121.

PERFORMERS TO WATCH FOR!

EUBIE BLAKE performs frequently at concerts and festivals. He also makes guest appearances on TV talk shows and radio programs. Watch your local paper - don't miss Eubie!

PETER FAHRENHOLTZ tours regularly in Denmark (and occasionally in other European countries). He plays solo ragtime and also with bands.

GLENN MEYER makes regular appearances with his band in the St. Louis, Missouri, area.

MAX MORATH is on the road with "The Ragtime Years." Watch for it!

TOM NOEL is on the road with two living portrayal shows: "Mark Twain at Home" and "Mr. Jelly Lord," the latter based on the life of Jelly Roll Morton.

RAGTIME RADIO

TREBOR TICHENOR has a weekly show called "Ragophile with Trebor Tichenor," on KWMU-FM (90.7, St. Louis, Missouri), Fridays, 7-8 p. m.

HANK TROY's ragtime program is on KVOD-FM (Denver, Colorado), Tuesdays, 6:30 - 7:00 p. m.

TERRY WALDO hosts "This Is Ragtime" on National Public Radio. Check your local listings for this weekly half-hour show.

GALEN WILKES presents "The Ragtime Years," a weekly half-hour show, on WVHC-FM (88.7, Hempstead, Long Island, N. Y.), on Tuesdays, 9-9:30 p. m.

****

BUGLE CALL RAG

Fox Trot

BY J. HUBERT BLAKE AND CAREY MORGAN

AND JEANETTE WARNER.
(ORIGINATOR OF THE FOX-TROT)

"JEAN"

M. DOYLE HARKS CO.
309 E. Water St.,
Elmira, (Est.) New York.

50¢